



Representative Eshoo's Response to Hurricane Katrina

This unprecedented national tragedy of Hurricane Katrina revealed not only failures within our national disaster preparedness and response plan, but it also exposed some very painful truths about deep economic divisions of class and race which still exist in our country. Most of those who were left behind in New Orleans were poor; they remained behind because they had no means to escape. Cleaning up the disaster sites and rebuilding the Gulf Coast communities is a critical part of the recovery, but we need to do much more to strengthen the social safety net to ensure that the people of this region can recover and that we never leave vulnerable citizens behind again.

I've received an overwhelming number of e-mails, letters and phone calls from concerned constituents wanting to help. They've also expressed their sadness and their outrage, demanding to know what Congress will do to ensure something like this never happens again.

The following are actions and steps I've taken since the disaster hit. There will, of course, be more legislation offered in the weeks and months ahead, but the following is an up-to-date report to you.

Emergency Aid for Clean-up and Reconstruction

I've already voted for \$62.3 billion in emergency aid to meet some of the immediate needs of those affected. What we've done so far represents only a down payment of what will be required in the long term. This emergency aid is already moving to the region.

Bills to Assist Victims of Katrina

- To ensure that Katrina survivors have access to health care, I've cosponsored H.R. 3698, the *Temporary Medicaid Disaster Relief Act of 2005*. The bill simplifies the eligibility and enrollment requirements to ensure that Hurricane Katrina victims are provided with healthcare coverage through existing Medicaid programs.
- I voted for H.R. 3672, the *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Response and Recovery Act of 2005*, to ensure that anyone displaced by Hurricane Katrina can continue to access the benefits they're entitled to. This bill has been signed into law by the President.
- Because the response to Katrina has had an added strain on our public health system, I've formally urged the Speaker of the House to postpone any cuts to Medicaid. Our fellow citizens need this safety net now more than ever and will for some time to come.

- In order to help the approximately 372,000 students displaced by Hurricane Katrina, I'm proud to cosponsor H.R. 3748, the *Displaced Student Relief Act*. This important legislation establishes a fund within the Department of Education for Fiscal Years '05 and '06 to allocate \$8,305 per student to state education agencies to cover the costs of educating students displaced by the hurricane. These funds will pay for books, classrooms, teachers, transportation, counseling and other student services and school needs.
- I voted for and the President signed into law, the *Pell Grant Hurricane and Disaster Relief Act* (H.R. 3169) and the *Student Grant Hurricane and Disaster Relief Act*, (H.R. 3668), and H.R. 2132, which together allow the Secretary of Education to waive higher education grant and loan repayment requirements for students impacted by natural disasters.
- I voted for H.R. 3761, the *Flexibility for Displaced Workers Act*, which will provide worker retraining and job location assistance to those who have lost their homes and jobs because of the hurricane.
- I voted for the *Katrina Emergency Tax Relief Act* (which the House passed unanimously). The bill provides important tax relief to hurricane victims, as well as incentives for charitable giving.
- I voted for *National Flood Insurance Program Enhanced Borrowing Authority Act*, which has been signed into law. The bill ensures that there will be the necessary cash on hand to pay hurricane-related claims.
- Since 2000, 2-1-1 has been designated as the free, three-digit telephone number for community, volunteer, health and human services information and referrals. Both Texas and Louisiana have statewide 2-1-1 services, and have successfully used 2-1-1 as the primary conduit for evacuees to receive services for finding loved ones, health care, housing, employment, and other urgent problems. I've sponsored legislation, H.R. 896, the *Calling for 2-1-1 Act*, which would encourage communities to establish 2-1-1 services for their residents and help establish 2-1-1 as the primary hotline for non-emergency information and referrals in every state. I've contacted the House Leadership and Energy & Commerce Chairman Barton, urging them to include my bill in any Hurricane Katrina relief proposals.

Investigating and Fixing What Went Wrong

Hurricane Katrina was the first test of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and it failed miserably. In order to restore confidence, there has to be accountability. I believe an independent commission is needed to investigate what went wrong and why.

- I've cosponsored legislation to establish an independent Katrina Commission (mirrored after the 9/11 Commission) to examine and evaluate the federal government's response to Hurricane Katrina and assess our ability to respond to future large-scale disasters. The

Katrina Commission would consist of ten members (5 Republicans and 5 Democrats). The Commission would be afforded the same investigative powers which the 9/11 Commission had and would be tasked with finding the answers to the critical questions that must be dealt with.

- I cosponsored H.R. 3659, the *National Emergency Management Improvement Act*, which removes FEMA from the Department of Homeland Security, restoring it as a fully independent agency. I've always believed FEMA should be independent, and it's why I voted against its inclusion under DHS in 2002. The bill also requires that FEMA be led by an emergency management professional reporting directly to the President.

Under the disastrous tenure of former FEMA Director Michael D. Brown, we've paid too high a price having someone in charge of an agency who doesn't know anything about the mission of the agency, much less the professional wherewithal to lead it. Now that Mr. Brown has stepped aside, the President has the opportunity to appoint a FEMA Director who is a qualified emergency response professional with the leadership experience to manage disasters. Ultimately, the buck stops with the President.

Helpful Information

I've set up a link on my website where you can obtain information on how families can find a loved one affected by Hurricane Katrina, and how to contact organizations providing relief: <http://eshoo.house.gov/news/katrina090105.aspx>.

What You Can Do

In order to ready your home and family for an emergency or disaster, I've also posted a Disaster Preparedness Section on my website that is accessible from the homepage: <http://eshoo.house.gov>. It contains information on how to prepare a survival kit for your home or car, as well as local emergency contact information.

Be assured that I will continue to do everything in my power to ensure that this broken system is fixed, that the victims of Hurricane Katrina receive the assistance they so desperately need and deserve, and that we investigate thoroughly and learn from the results so we never experience a human disaster of this magnitude again. The American people deserve no less.